

New directions

in prevention

Vermont Department of Health • Division of Alcohol & Drug Abuse Programs

In the fall of 1997, Vermont was one of five states to be awarded a \$9 million State Incentive Grant by the federal Centers for Substance Abuse Prevention. The bulk of the dollars from this federal grant funded 23 community coalitions around the state.

New Directions is the name given to this effort. Through New Directions whole communities were enlisted in preventing and reducing alcohol, marijuana and other drug use among youth.

The design of New Directions is simple. In order to succeed, coalitions must:

- Act together as a community
- Combine multiple strategies, not just lean on a "silver bullet"
- Increase the factors that protect youth from substance use
- Decrease the influences that encourage youth to use
- Sustain efforts over time

Overall, 107,500 youth were served over three years of New Directions. What did they do?

School-based curricula

Nearly 15,000 middle school students benefited from a school-based curriculum—Life Skills Training or Project Northland. Life Skills Training helps students learn skills for achieving their goals and resisting influences to use substances. Project Northlands combines school curriculum with family and community education.

Changing the environment

Strategies designed to change the larger community in which youth make decisions about substances were funded: local media campaigns, community education, review and revision of school alcohol and drug policies and training for local retailers. Over 30,000 youth were involved in these efforts.

Strengthening Connections

New Directions coalitions carried out programs designed to support specific groups, such as students who are having a difficult time in school. Over 1500 young people were paired with mentors and

others participated in school-based programs like Reconnecting Youth. In addition, intensive family education programs, such as Strengthening Families, served 126 youth and their parents. These programs help families build better communication skills, reduce family conflict and

reduce early substance use.

Student Assistance Programs

New Directions funded Student Assistance Counselors provided over 36,000 services to youth in school. These included workshops, support groups, parent meetings, screening and referrals to counseling.

Activities Augment Programs

New Directions funded activities designed to enlist community coalition involvement and to enhance programs. At least 24,000 youth participated in a variety of structured, substance-free social and recreational activities. These activities were targeted at youth who may have fewer opportunities to develop the personal skills needed to avoid problem behaviors, and were linked with other prevention strategies.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

Hundreds of adults, including parents, grandparents, community leaders, educators, businesses, law enforcement, and all sorts of volunteers have received training and participated in projects and programs. Most importantly, youth and adults have strengthened relationships and teamed up to lead coalition efforts.

Future issues will focus on outcomes of New Directions coalition activities.



Community Coalitions speak out

as a result of New Directions



New Directions coalition coordinators share what they have learned about increasing local participation in substance abuse prevention initiatives...

"Don't reinvent the wheel...know what is out there!"

Identify existing community resources, including people, clubs and organizations. Tap into their expertise. Coordinating and collaborating efforts—not duplicating—led to success.

"The coalition approach was ideal for us—easy to get work done and makes the money stretch when working with other agencies."

While the creation of a diverse coalition was a challenge, the majority of coordinators agreed that there were benefits to a diverse membership. These included the skills and knowledge of the various members. A coalition also creates a forum for communication, planning, networking, and developing a strong community response to the issue.

"That sounds like fun, but what does it have to do with substance abuse?"

Maintaining the focus on substance abuse prevention by helping members understand the connection between research-based programs and future outcomes was beneficial in sustaining community interest and support. Good public relations and communication skills were essential tools for coordinators.

"Research-based programs were a great jumping off place. If we were given a blank slate, it would have been too difficult."

Overall, the credibility of having a research-based program behind them was invaluable to coordinators when proposing programs or activities to schools and community members. However, modifying programs to meet the unique needs of

INVOLVING YOUTH

Coalitions Share Strategies

“Give us respect and we’ll give it back,” student Jennifer Dubuque said to Governor Howard Dean at a community dialogue night sponsored by the New Directions Lamoille Valley Coalition of Supervisory Unions.

This quote represents the essence of what was learned by the coalition coordinators as keys to successful recruitment and active involvement of youth. Not unlike the rewards adults enjoy when being asked to serve on a committee or council—recognition, having a say in decisions and making a difference—youth were actively engaged with the following strategies.

Northfield was one of many of the New Directions coalitions with a top priority of purposefully involving and engaging youth.

“This has been a wonderful experience for me, as well as the other youth who serve on the local boards. Not only have we been given a voice, but we have also gained self-confidence and skills we’ll need later in life. You learn time management, public speaking, leadership and social skills,” says Nicole

Miller, youth co-chair of the New Directions Coalition in Northfield.

In Cabot, the coalition set out to identify leadership opportunities for youth, based on their own skills and interests, and to include youth in decisionmaking.

“When young people know that they have a say in how business will be conducted they customarily show up to make decisions,”

said Lori Augustyniak who coordinates Cabot’s coalition.

Coalition coordinators from around the state were asked to list the most successful strategies for involving youth. As summarized in the above quotes, coordinators emphasized the importance of placing youth in leadership roles, involving youth in all aspects of program planning, design and implementation, respecting youth, and having youth serve as full voting members of the coalition or coalition youth council.

“If you serve the pizza, the students will come!” is the motto of the Connecting Youth in Chittenden South Coalition and a strategy used by other coalitions as well.

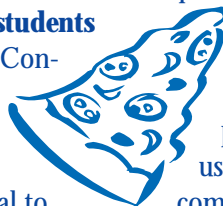
Coordinators found it essential to

provide food and refreshments to youth and the adults who served on the coalition as a sign of appreciation for coalition members’ devotion of time and energy. Pizza was also a good recruitment tool.

About one-third of the coalitions found success recruiting youth to join in by sending out personal invitations to specific students and youth and asking them to participate in activities or positions of leadership.

The strategy used by the Deerfield Valley Community Partnership, according to coordinator Cindy Hayford, is to send an invitation letter to specific students. The letter explains the program or activity, why the student was chosen, and why it would be beneficial to participate. The letter is followed up with a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting.

One important thing that is consistent among these successful strategies is the emphasis on youth—listening to youth, respecting their expertise, and providing a variety of opportunities for them to partner with adults. Youth can be your strongest resource in preventing alcohol and other drug use and abuse in the school and the community.



Coalitions speak out

Continued from page 1

rural Vermont while maintaining program integrity was a challenge.

“Without the training and technical assistance, none of this could have happened.”

The bimonthly coordinators meetings and other training provided an opportunity for “higher education” and was critical to success.

“Now that I understand how to use the data we’ve collected, evaluation isn’t so scary!”

The data is useful as a way to monitor progress and make needed improvements. It also helps when applying for additional grant funding.

New Directions Framework for Prevention Planning

A number of factors have been associated with alcohol and other drug use among youth. Those that tend to protect young people and make it less likely they will use alcohol or other drugs are called protective factors; those factors that tend to increase the likelihood of drug use are called risk factors.

Protective Factors

- Strong bonds between youth and adults.
- Opportunities exist for youth to have a meaningful involvement in the community.
- Youth involvement in the community is recognized.
- Youth have skills necessary for becoming mature adults.
- Healthy beliefs and clear standards related to alcohol, tobacco and other drug use are communicated and modeled.

Risk Factors

- Alcohol and other drugs are readily available.
- Norms are unclear or encourage use.

- Laws and ordinances are unclear or inconsistently enforced.
- Family member with a history of alcohol and other drug abuse.
- Parents use drugs, involve youth in their use (“get me a beer, would you?” or tolerate use by youth).
- Thinks most friends use.
- Thinks alcohol and other drug use is “cool.”
- Begins using at a young age.
- Lacks commitment or sense of belonging to school.*

** Not as strong a correlation to youth substance abuse as the others on this list.*

Vermont coalition wins national award!

Deerfield Valley Community Prevention Partnership of Wilmington was honored nationally for its success in curbing substance abuse at the community level.

The award came from Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA), a national organization representing more than 5000 community anti-drug coalitions nationwide dedicated to building drug-free communities.

The Deerfield Valley Community Partnership was singled out for its effective efforts to reduce substance abuse through community education, community mobilization, prevention training and in-school programs.

Demonstrating what a group of concerned citizens can do, alcohol and tobacco use fell substantially among middle school and high school students in the Windham Southwest Supervisory Union between 1999 and 2001. Among eighth graders, alcohol use fell 34 percent and tobacco use fell 10 percent. Among high school seniors, alcohol use fell 12 percent and tobacco use dropped 27 percent.

The partnership began as the Drug Free Schools & Communities Advisory Board and received a federal expansion grant in 1995. They hired a part-time prevention coordinator and began to introduce research-based prevention curriculum in the schools. This put the community in an excellent position to apply for and receive a New Directions grant in 1998.

Today, after four years of New Directions funding, the community and the program is much changed.

- The community has hired a full-time prevention coordinator and developed a comprehensive prevention plan that identifies problems and lays out measurable goals and objectives. Research-based programs and strategies are being implemented to address problems and include an evaluation component.



- Project Northlands is being implemented in all five schools for grades 6 through 8. This curriculum was chosen because it involves school, community and family, and has been proven to work in rural areas. The evaluation results of Project Northland verify that the middle school students have gained knowledge of the harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

- Prevention has become a community effort. Over 20 adults and youth attend the coalition meetings every month. This group represents 14 out of the possible 17 sectors in the community. It includes parents, youth, police officers, a doctor, supervisory union business manager, teachers and business people.

- Prior to New Directions a parenting program was offered in the community; there was little interest or attendance. Last year, 10 families participated in a 14-week parenting program and four more are currently on a waiting list. In addition, a monthly Parenting Education Workshop series ran year-round.

- Community nights are well attended, with between 50 and 80 people at each event. The goal of these groups is to change community norms and enable youth and adults the opportunity to come together in a substance-free atmosphere.

- Youth are working with adults—planning substance-free activities and gaining life skills. Together they are making prevention videos and radio announcements, hanging prevention posters in schools and changing school policies.

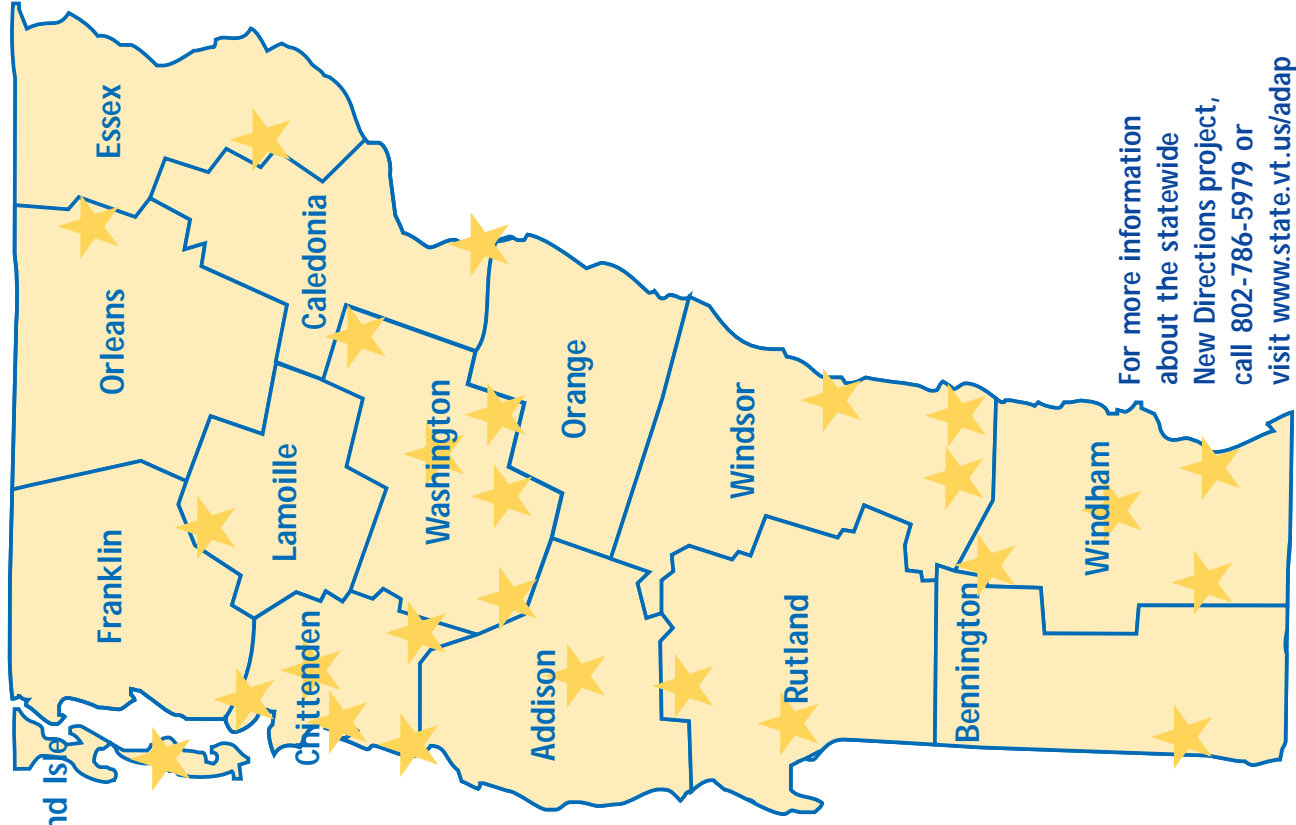
- Last fall, no middle school parties with alcohol took place as is typically the case. At a drug and alcohol dialogue night, middle school students indicated that few students were using.

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America “Outstanding Coalition” awards are given based on a coalition’s capacity to demonstrate a measurable contribution to the community by reducing and preventing substance abuse and related problems, creating innovative programs, and serving as a resource and model for other programs.

The success of Deerfield Community Partnership demonstrates what a group of concerned citizens can do to change community attitudes about alcohol and drug abuse, and improve the lives of young people and families.

New Directions Coalitions

(Coalitions that have been or are currently being funded by New Directions.)



For more information
about the statewide
New Directions project,
call 802-786-5979 or
visit www.state.vt.us/adap

Vermont
Department
of Health

Division of Alcohol
& Drug Abuse Programs

108 Cherry Street, PO Box 70, Burlington, VT 05402-0070

